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AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN PASS TO AMEMBASSY GRENADA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/11/30

TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM BF CASC ASEC

SUBJECT: NASSAU: CRIMES TARGETING TOURISTS MAY BE CONNECTED

REF: NASSAU 695; NASSAU 531; NASSAU 113

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¶11. (C) Eighteen tourists were robbed at gunpoint while on a popular eco-tour on New Providence November 20. The same day in separate incidents, two tourists were robbed in the down town area; one incident occurring near the U.S. Embassy. On November 23 a U.S. citizen was allegedly assaulted and robbed inside the Wyndham Hotel, Cable Beach. These incidents come in the wake of a stream of violent crimes committed in tourist areas and perpetrated against tourists in Nassau. The Minister of National Security, Tommy Turnquest, reported that the crimes may be connected and the police are following "significant leads." He said a "person of interest" was in police custody but that further information could not be provided so as not to jeopardize the investigation.

¶12. (C) Tourists have criticized the police response after the Queen's Staircase (Ref A) and eco-tour robberies, calling the response a "police academy comedy" and the interview process a "waste of time." In a press conference, the GCOB said it made every effort to help tourist crime victims. Director General of Tourism, Vernice Walkine, acknowledged during the conference that it was becoming increasingly difficult to protect tourists from crime and that it was hard to keep such incidents from reaching potential tourists. Disney and Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines both reportedly cancelled the eco-tour excursion from their list of available tours.

¶13. (C) Because tourists represent easy, vulnerable targets, similar crimes are likely to continue unless Police presence is significantly increased in popular tourist areas. The owner of one tour company acknowledged that "these criminals know the police aren't there [tourist areas] and they target it." Tourists have begun posting videos of their ordeals on websites such as YouTube which might affect vacationers choice of Nassau as a holiday destination. The eco-tour robbery also received press coverage in Florida, the closest U.S. tourist market to The Bahamas.

¶14. (C) COMMENT: The GCOB worries that the frequency of crimes, especially against tourists, will cause the U.S. to issue a travel warning on The Bahamas. The public outcry, including calls to replace the Minister of National Security, and threat of a U.S. travel warning may force the GCOB to take steps to address the serious crime problem in Nassau.

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